

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY BONN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6493

INFO USMISSION USBERLIN

AMCONSUL BREMEN

AMCONSUL DUSSELDORF

AMCONSUL FRANKFURT

AMCONSUL HAMBURG

AMCONSUL MUNICH

AMCONSUL STUTTGART

AMEMBASSY BERLIN

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BONN 18415

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PGOV, GW

SUBJECT: THE FDP -- THEY WILL HAVE TO TRY HARDER

SUMMARY: IN DESCRIBING THE FDP TO A VISITING U.S. SENATOR, THE FDP SECRETARY GENERAL MARTIN BANGEMANN SAID "WE'RE NO. 3 -- WE TRY HARDER." WHILE THIS SEMI-HUMOROUS DESCRIPTION MAY OR MAY NOT BE ACCURATE, THE PRESENT STATE OF THE FDP DEMANDS THAT THEY WILL HAVE TO TRY HARDER. THE CHANGE IN PARTY LEADERSHIP FROM SCHEEL TO GENSCHER, THE DISAPPOINTING RESULTS OF THE ELECTIONS IN HESSE AND BAVARIA, THE RECURRENT TENSION WITHIN THE LIBERAL-SOCIAL COALITION IN BONN, AND THE IDENTITY/PROFILE DILEMMA ALL SPELL CONSIDERABLE DIFFICULTIES FOR THE LIBERAL PARTY. WHILE THE SITUATION HAS NOT REACHED CRISIS PROPORTIONS IT IS CLEAR THAT THE FDP WILL HAVE TO SHAPE UP BETWEEN NOW AND NEXT SPRING OR FACE THE POSSIBILITY OF FURTHER LOSSES IN SUCH CRITICAL PROVINCIAL

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ELECTIONS AS NORTH-RHINE WESTPHALIA. END SUMMARY

1. WHILE THERE IS CONSIDERABLE DEBATE ABOUT THE SPECIFIC CAUSES OF THE POOR SHOWING OF THE FDP IN HESSE AND BAVARIA IT IS AGREED THAT THE OVERLY CLOSE IDENTIFICATION WITH THE SPD AND THE RESULTING LACK OF A CLEAR PROFILE WERE SIGNIFICANT FACTORS. THIS IS PARTICULARLY TRUE BECAUSE VOTING STUDIES SUGGEST THAT IN 1969 AND 1972 ELECTIONS FREE DEMOCRATIC GAINS WERE AT THE EXPENSE OF THE SPD. IN THE 1974 HESSE ELECTION, HOWEVER, MANY SPD VOTERS SWITCHED DIRECTLY FROM THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC COLUMN OVER TO THE CDU RATHER THAN DO THE MIDDLE PARTY -- THE FDP. TO COPE WITH THE IDENTITY/PROFILE PROBLEM, PARTY LEADERS ARE CONSIDERING SETTING UP A SPECIAL PARTY COMMISSION TO IDENTIFY SPECIFIC PROGRAMS AND POLICIES FOR THE 1976 ELECTION THAT WILL BE CLEARLY IDENTIFIED AS LIBERAL. THIS IN ITSELF IS EASIER SAID THAN DONE BECAUSE THERE IS A CONSIDERABLE DIVERSITY OF VIEWS WITHIN THE FDP AND AT A TIME WHEN THE ECONOMY IS WEAKENED BY GROWING INFLATION AND UNEMPLOYMENT IT IS UNLIKELY THAT COSTLY NEW LIBERAL PROGRAMS WOULD BE VERY POPULAR WITH THE GERMAN VOTERS. THE PROBLEM OF FINDING A PROFILE WHICH WILL ATTRACT VOTES BEYOND THE SMALL CORE OF PARTY LOYALISTS IS FURTHER COMPLICATED IN THAT THE TRADITIONAL ROLE AS A "BRAKE" ON THE LARGER COALITION PARTNER HAS BEEN PREEMPTED BY CHANCELLOR SCHMIDT.

2. THE FDP IS ALSO PLAGUED WITH ORGANIZATIONAL PROBLEMS. THE PARTY IS IN DEBT AND THOUGH THE LEADERSHIP CLAIMS THAT THE TRADITIONAL SOURCES OF INCOME HAVE NOT DRIED UP (AS SOME HAVE CLAIMED BECAUSE OF A LEFTIST TREND IN THE FDP) THEY DO ADMIT THAT THE PARTY HAS BEEN SPENDING CONSIDERABLY MORE THAN IT HAS TAKEN IN. ONE CONSEQUENCE IS THAT THE NATIONAL PARTY HEADQUARTERS IS FORCED TO REDUCE STAFF: SOMETHING IT IS RELUCTANT TO DO GIVEN THE KEY LAND ELECTIONS SCHEDULED FOR 1975 (BERLIN, NORTH-RHINE WESTPHALIA, RHINELAND-PALATINATE, SAARLAND, BREMEN AND SCHLESWIG HOLSTEIN.)

3. IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THE PRESS HAS OVERPLAYED THE CONFIDENTIAL

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DEGREE OF TENSION WITHIN THE COALITION, PARTICULARLY BETWEEN GENSCHER AND SCHMIDT. HOWEVER, EVEN THE MOST CAUTIOUS OBSERVERS DESCRIBE THE RELATIONSHIPS IN THE CABINET AS "CORRECT" AT BEST. RECENTLY, ADDITIONALLY, WHEN SCHMIDT WAS INTERVIEWED ON TELEVISION ABOUT THE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE COALITION PARTNERS, HE CITED THE GOOD WORKING RELATIONSHIP HE AND OTHER SPD MINISTERS HAD WITH THREE OF THE FOUR FDP MINISTERS, LEAVING OUT

INTERIOR MINISTER MAIHOFFER. WHEN THE INTERVIEWER
PRESSED SCHMIDT ABOUT THE OMISSION HE ADDED INSULT TO
INJURY BY SAYING THAT THE WORK OF THE INTERIOR MINISTRY
WAS EXTREMELY COMPLICATED AND VARIED AND THAT MAIHOFFER
NEEDED TIME TO WORK HIMSELF INTO THE NEW JOB. ONE FDP
PARTY FUNCTIONARY CONFIRMED SCHMIDT'S SENTIMENTS AND
SAID THAT IT WAS NO SURPRISE BECAUSE MAIHOFFER AS AN

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 BONN 18415

INTELLECTUAL PROFESSOR WAS A VERY UNSYMPATHETIC TYPE FOR
SCHMIDT. THERE HAVE ALSO BEEN REPORTS OF THE CHANCEL-
LOR'S LACK OF PATIENCE WITH MAIHOFFER AT CABINET MEET-
INGS. EVEN IF THE RELATIONS ARE NOT AS DIFFICULT AS
SOME SEGMENTS OF THE PRESS CLAIM, THE POLITICAL NECES-
SITY FOR FDP MINISTERS TO TAKE PUBLIC POSITIONS CLEARLY
IDENTIFIABLE AS LIBERAL (WHICH IF NOT IN CONFLICT WITH
SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC POLICY AT LEAST MUST BE DIFFERENT
ENOUGH TO PROVIDE A SEPARATE PROFILE) IS BOUND TO MAKE

WORKING RELATIONS MORE DIFFICULT, ESPECIALLY AS THE ELECTION CAMPAIGNS HEAT UP.

4. IT IS CLEAR THAT GENSCHER, WHO WAS ELECTED PARTY LEADER AT THE END OF SEPTEMBER, HAS NOT YET TAKEN A FIRM HOLD ON THE PARTY APPARATUS. SOME PROFESSIONAL FDP POLITICIANS HAVE EXPRESSED DISAPPOINTMENT TO EMBASSY OFFICERS BECAUSE THEY EXPECTED HIM TO BE MORE ENGAGED WITH PARTY AFFAIRS. HIS FREQUENT TRAVEL OUTSIDE
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OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC AND THE OTHER DEMANDS OF HIS DUTIES AS FOREIGN MINISTER ALSO MILITATE AGAINST FULL-TIME PARTY ACTIVITY. TO COMPLICATE MATTERS, NEITHER SECRETARY GENERAL BANGEMANN NOR DEPUTY PARTY LEADER FRIDERICHS HAVE YET TO TAKE FIRM HOLD OF THEIR NEW PARTY POSITIONS EITHER AND THE RESULT HAS BEEN A LACK OF A FIRM LIBERAL LEADERSHIP AT THE TOP.

5. NONE OF THE ABOVE PROBLEMS ARE INSOLUBLE NOR IS THE LIBERAL PARTY YET IN ACUTE CRISIS. IN ADDITION, SOME FACTORS SHOULD WORK IN THE PARTY'S FAVOR. IT WILL NOT, FOR EXAMPLE, BE IN THE INTERESTS OF THE SPD TO HAVE THE LIBERAL PARTY BECOME SO WEAK AS TO BE UNABLE TO OBTAIN THE FIVE PERCENT MINIMUM VOTE REQUIRED TO ENTER THE VARIOUS LAND LEGISLATURES OR THE BUNDESTAG AND THIS SHOULD HAVE A BENEFICIAL EFFECT ON SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC-LIBERAL COOPERATION. IN THE 1970 LANDTAG ELECTION IN NORTH RHINE-WESTPHALIA (NRW), THE FDP RECEIVED 5.5 PERCENT (7.8 PERCENT IN THE 1972 BUNDESTAG ELECTIONS). SHOULD THE FDP FAIL TO REACH 5 PERCENT IN NRW, ONE HIGH-RANKING FDP OFFICIAL TOLD AN EMBASSY OFFICER, THE WHOLE QUESTION OF CONTINUING THE SOCIAL-LIBERAL COALITION IN BONN WOULD BE OPEN. SUCH A SITUATION WOULD NOT BE IN THE INTEREST OF THE SPD WHICH NEEDS FDP SUPPORT TO GOVERN. ANOTHER POSITIVE FACTOR IS THAT THE LIBERALS KNOW THEY ARE FIGHTING FOR THEIR SURVIVAL IN THE FORTHCOMING ELECTIONS. GIVEN SOME TIME TO IRON OUT THE ORGANIZATIONAL DIFFICULTIES, GENSCHER, FRIDERICHS AND BANGEMANN MAY BE SUCCESSFUL IN SHAPING UP THE FDP BUT THEY CERTAINLY WILL HAVE TO "TRY HARDER" IF THIS IS TO BE THE CASE.

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